

TABLE OF GODS



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Sin's Moon Bread

The Akkadian term *aklu* meant both “bread” and “food,” which says a lot about the importance of bread in this era. People in ancient Mesopotamia mainly baked two types of bread: leavened and unleavened.

Unleavened flatbread was most common in ancient Mesopotamia, where the saline soils were better suited to cultivating barley than wheat.* They also used various types of ovens—the cylindrical clay oven called *tinuru* being the most common and economical, as clay was freely available to all.

Bakers also formed their breads into various shapes depending on their purpose. They shaped bread into balls, hands, and believe it or not, even female breasts.

Cylinder seals reveal that some breads were shaped into crescents, and an educated guess is that they were offered to the moon god Sin, who resided in Ur. In a myth where Sin visits his father Enlil, he was offered crescent-shaped cakes, confirming that the god liked his food in crescent shapes.

Two things you should do if you make this ancient bread dish:

1. Email me a photo of the result at arim@tableofgods.com and let me know how it tasted 😊
2. Offer some of it to Sin (yes, you can eat the leftovers)

Naptunu qarrub!

Arim

*Barley has less gluten than wheat, so it doesn't rise as well and makes denser, less fluffy bread.

Origin: Ur 2105 BC
Prep time: 1 hour
Rise time: 25 minutes
Cook time: 50 minutes
Serves: 6

Ingredients

Filling

1 pound (450 g) 90% lean ground beef (for a vegetarian alternative, replace the beef with 1¼ lb. / 570 g button mushrooms, finely chopped)
3 medium yellow onions, finely chopped
¼ cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
6 tablespoons (85 g) salted butter
1½ teaspoons table salt
1 cup (50 g) finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Dough

4½ cups (650 g) all-purpose flour, plus more as needed
1½ teaspoons table salt
2 cups (475 ml) lukewarm water
Salted butter for frying

Instructions

1. To make the filling, in a large pan, cook the beef (or mushrooms) over medium-high heat, breaking it up with a spoon as you go, until the beef is fully browned and cooked through (or until the liquid from the mushrooms has evaporated).
2. Add the onions and oil to the pan and sauté for about 3 minutes, or until the onions have softened and turned translucent.
3. Add the butter and salt and continue to sauté for another 2 minutes. Set aside to cool.
4. Stir in the parsley once the mixture has cooled.
5. To make the dough, in a large bowl, mix half the flour with the salt and water, stirring with a spoon until it is a sticky dough.
6. Add the remaining flour and knead the dough with your hands or a stand mixer until it begins to pull away from the sides of the bowl, then knead for another 4–5 minutes. If the dough is still sticky, add more flour a little at a time until it is smooth.
7. Cover the dough with a kitchen towel and let it rest for 25 minutes.
8. On a floured surface, divide the dough into 18 equal parts and roll each one into a ball. Cover them with a kitchen towel.
9. Working with one ball at a time, on a floured surface, roll it out into a circle about 6 inches (15 cm) in diameter.
10. Add 3 tablespoons of filling onto one half of the circle, then fold over the other half.
11. Press out any air from the half-moon by gently pressing with your palm before sealing the edges with your fingers. Trim any excess dough with a knife.
12. As you finish each half-moon, set it aside on a floured surface and cover with a kitchen towel. Repeat with the remaining dough.
13. Melt a knob of butter in a large pan over medium heat and fry two to three half-moons at a time, cooking them for 2 minutes on each side, or until golden brown. Place the fried moon breads on a wire rack while you fry the remaining ones. Each time you add a new batch of half-moons, add another knob of butter.
14. Serve the moon breads with a side salad.